When viewers and critics perceive a style, trend, or series of themes in a director's repertoire, there is an immediate and understandable assumption that this is largely due to the director's personal input or agenda, thereby giving credit to the auteur theory. The theory, which was popularized by the illustrious French publication, *Cahiers du Cinema*, has been a prominent method of film analysis since the mid-fifties and is today a canonical part of academic film studies. Nonetheless, there is a fair amount of criticism in regards to the discrediting of others in the filmmaking process, which has led to the development of related theories.

Among these is the relatively recent "Schreiber Theory," named as a reference to the Yiddish word for "writer." This theory, which was influenced by earlier writers like Richard Corliss, Patrick McGilligan, and Pauline Kael, further opens analysis in the question of who truly creates films. In this theory, author David Morris Kipen argues for the recognition of screenwriters as auteurs, rather than directors, claiming, "A filmgoer seeking out pictures written by, say, Eric Roth or Charlie Kaufman won't always see a masterpiece, but he'll see fewer clunkers than he would following even a brilliant director like John Boorman, or an intelligent actor like Jeff Goldblum" (Kipen, 38).

However, it is a relatively unexamined opinion that the true auteurs are the filmmakers who both write and direct their works; the aforementioned theories discount the contributions of one party or the other and discount, therefore, authorial intention or directorial execution. Not by coincidence, many of the filmmakers that are currently hailed as auteurs do, in fact, fall into this category of writer-directors. The list includes Stanley Kubrick, Woody Allen, David Lynch, Joel and Ethan Coen, Lars von Trier, and

Quentin Tarantino, all of whom had or have enormous control and undeniably characteristic styles.

In the case of another celebrated writer and director, Jane Campion, this kind of control not only allows her to be an auteur, but a feminist one at that. As the author and executor of her works, she is able to ensure the proper expression of her visions in terms of content, acting, and visuals. By looking at several of Campion's works that are most strikingly feminist in nature, there arises a clear conclusion that, had she not been the leader both creatively and executively, her specific style would not have been possible and her ideological goals largely unachieved. In the cases of films like *Bright Star, An Angel At My Table*, and *A Portrait of a Lady,* Campion was working with a biography, a series of autobiographies, and a novel, respectively. In these films, Campion's signature themes are notably less present and her style noticeably less potent. She was restricted by the need for loyalty to the original works and was therefore less able to creatively demonstrate her auteurist qualities. However, in the works that will be discussed, her creative capabilities are in no way stifled and therefore represent clearly her auteurism.

British academic John Caughie wrote in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, that the films of an auteur are "more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films" (Caughie, 9). However, this generalization, that recognizes directors as the clear auteurs, is nearly impossible without the consideration of the necessary consistency in screenwriting or story composition. Because of Campion's concurrent roles as writer and director, her personal views are indeed quite apparent and her style unwavering, as unusual female protagonists, the

female gaze, prominent female sexuality, and an overarching emphasis on nature can be easily observed in all three of the works that will be considered: *Sweetie (1989), The Piano (1993)*, and *Top of the Lake* (2013). Because of these similarities, the works clearly resemble each other, and this should be attributed to Campion's authorial and directorial control.

One such illustration of Campion's distinctive filmmaking is her 1989 work entitled *Sweetie*. The Australia-based, low budget film, which is her feature-length debut as both co-writer (with longtime friend Gerard Lee) and director, focuses on two clashing sisters, the quiet and reserved Kay (Karen Colston) and the mentally ill Dawn (Geneviève Lemon)—better known by her family as "Sweetie." The former, Kay, has been told by a psychic that a man with a question mark on his face will be very important to her future; this leads her to Louis (Tom Lycos), whose hair happens to fall over a mole on his forehead in a way resembling a question mark. The two soon move in together, but the sexual aspect of the relationship is killed when Louis tries to plant an "anniversary tree." The tension only grows after Sweetie, her producer/boyfriend, and the girls' father move into their home.

Of her family, only Kay views Sweetie as unmanageable as she creates a chaotic and havoc-filled world around Kay and Louis. Gordon (Jon Darling), the father, has been left by the girls' mother, Flo (Dorothy Barry), and is lost without her support and completely delusional about Sweetie's mental state. Eventually, Gordon and Flo reconcile and take Sweetie back to their home, away from Kay. However, just after this happens, Sweetie confines herself to her ramshackle childhood tree house and eventually takes a neighbor boy as a kind of hostage. The tree house, which is ill equipped to

support two people, comes crashing down, killing Sweetie. Only after this tragedy is Kay able to lead a normal life and reconnect with Louis.

This film, which features several of Kay's dreams, black and white sequences, unusual camera angles, and seemingly psychedelic episodes, is undoubtedly experimental and certainly less conventional than her later work. However, despite its rather

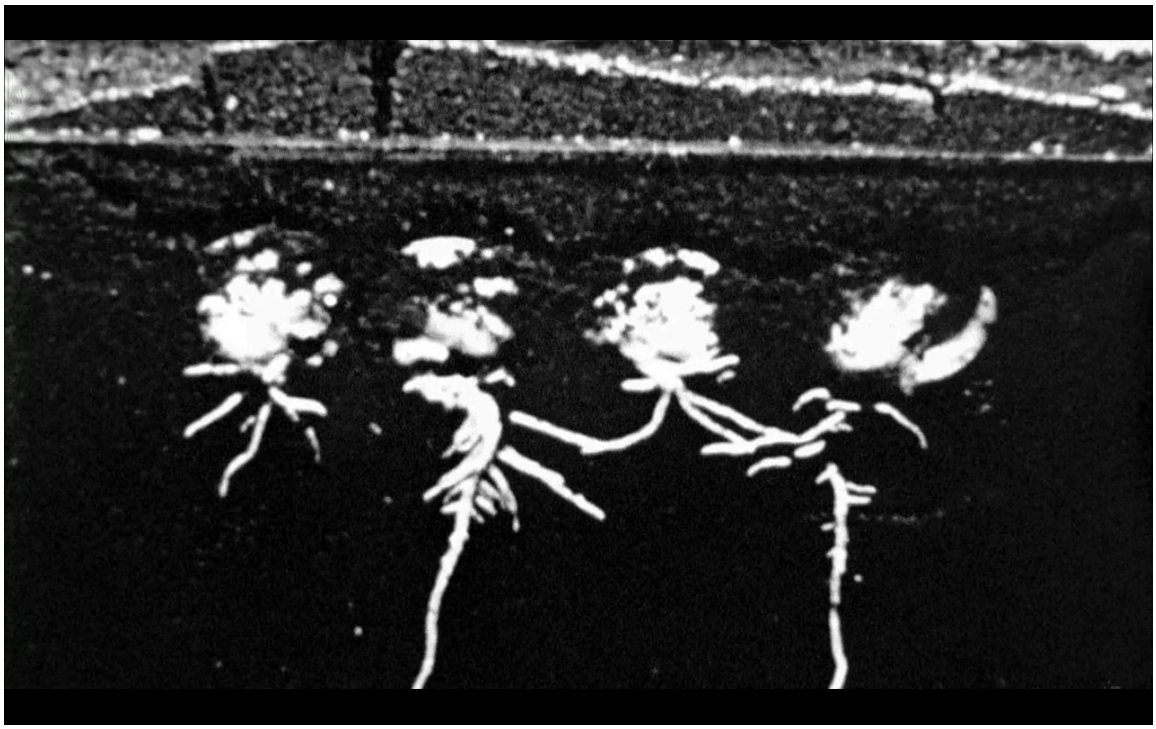

Image 1: A shot of seedlings from a dream Kay has about trees

nontraditional format, the film remains true to Campion's consistently idiosyncratic style and, as her full-length debut, could be said to establish it. Within this film, there are several noticeably feminist formal and creative techniques, tremendously distinguishable female characters, and an immediate and clear sense of the "female gaze"—which, in this argument, will be defined as the inverse of the seemingly almighty and inescapable "male gaze."

This tradition in cinema is so insidiously integrated into the practice of filmmaking that it often goes unnoticed, much less critically considered. In her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey discusses the subtle but meaningful ways in which editing and camerawork aid this tradition of misogynistic filmmaking and, often unintentionally, dehumanize women by sexualizing them and ignoring their nonphysical characteristics. Mulvey writes:

> …Conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) intergrade into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroyed the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen. (Mulvey, 720)

This, Mulvey argues, contrasts quite clearly with the treatment of male characters, which are (tellingly) usually the protagonists. In their case, they are followed quite closely by the camera and framed in long or medium shots, encompassing all or most of their bodies, often in a deep focus perspective. Rarely are male characters fragmented in the way that women are, and when this does happen, it is typically for a legitimately expositive purpose—showing a specific feature that adds to their characterization, noting an expression change, etc. Women, on the other hand, are normally reduced to these bizarrely flat and unreachable figures that require no exposition and merely create ways for the men to appear more heroic, charming, and so on.

Of this tradition, Feona Attwood, a scholar on sex in contemporary culture, writes that it "works to position women as embodiments of sex…and proclaims that women are ultimately unknowable as speaking subjects. It makes women a silence into which men

speak, a blank sheet on which male desire inscribes its fears and fantasies" (Attwood, 87). Because of men's agency, they are inevitably the more relatable figures, and the female characters are essentially props with which the men can play. The camera dutifully follows along with this play, and in these situations, the male characters both dictate the gaze and create the action (Mulvey, 720).

Image 2: A cut in *The Piano* that calls attention to the male gaze

This film, *Sweetie*, rejects this tradition from the very beginning, during which a voiceover narration by the female protagonist, Kay, "creates the action" and determines what the initial images will be—trees, in this case. In line with what film scholar Kathleen McHugh calls Campion's "insistent transgressions of industry cinema's continuity conventions and invisible style," Kay, rather than clearly introducing herself or the scene that begins the story, provides immediate insight and emotional exposition about herself even before she physically appears onscreen (McHugh, 199). She describes her sister's tree house, which she was never allowed in, and the nightmares that she has

about the roots of the tree. Kay then considers that these experiences could possibly explain her fear of trees, exposing that this kind of introspection is new to her. From this early point, the audience is clear about whom the protagonist will be, the deeply complex nature of her emotions, and her apparent lack of self-understanding and internal knowledge.

Further establishing the three dimensionality of Kay's character are the seeming contradictions that epitomize her hesitant but motivated personality. A timid figure, worried about the dark and the invasive powers of tree roots, Kay is somehow able to boldly and aggressively seduce and win over an already-engaged man. Despite the apparent incongruity of these actions, the two represented aspects of her personality are not at all contradictory but rather correlated. Kay's fear of trees' roots parallels directly with her fear of her own domination, and it pushes her to instead fully dictate her relationships. She is shown to be uncomfortable with a lack of control, particularly in regards to sexual advances and the overpowering characteristics of both her family and the natural world. From this discomfort comes her motivations for nearly everything; she, a seemingly pragmatic figure within her deeply dysfunctional and fragmented family, visits a psychic who indirectly leads her to Louis. She is not so much interested in the mysticism of the unseen, but rather feels a deep need to understand her life and make sense of the events and people who surround her. When Kay recognizes Louis as the prophetic man that the psychic mentioned, she immediately seizes the opportunity to steer her life by persuading him to leave his new fiancé so that she can fulfill what she believes to be her destiny. She confronts Louis, tells him of her realization, and, when he

says, “Anyway, this doesn’t matter. Because I’m in love with Cheryl,” she approaches and kisses him. This leads to their first sexual encounter and her overall victory. These

Image 3: The moment when Kay realizes Louis is the man with the question mark

simultaneous qualities of timidity and desperation for control make Kay not only the unusual protagonist that she is but also a direct defiance to the stereotypes that female characters are normally forced into.

Female characters, in the mainstream tradition, are usually definable by simple labels and fit clearly into stereotypical categories. Constance Penley, in her essay about the film *Cries and Whispers*, outlines these traditional representations of women with four distinct categories—the “victim,” the “temptress,” “evil incarnate,” and the “earth mother”—and decries that these categories are so identifiable and so seldom strayed from in traditional cinema (Penley, 106). *Sweetie’s* female characters, like Campion’s many other female protagonists, fit into none of these mentioned groups. Though they have

traits and tendencies that could be placed in these boxes, none of these aspects define their characters. Kay is obviously infinitely too complex to be so succinctly defined, and the same should be said of the other primary women. Sweetie, portrayed by consistent Campion favorite Geneviève Lemon, fits no recognizable stereotype. She is loud, vulgar, openly sexual, easily offended, and sometimes violent. Her severe and aggressive mental illness renders her wholly foreign at times, particularly because of traditional standards for female characters. Campion, as usual, not only shirks these standards, but also makes no attempt to portray this woman with "well-trodden techniques of appealing to the audience" (D'Cruz, 7). Similarly, the girls' mother, Flo, is also unusual in her characterization. Though she is less prominent in the film, Campion reveals enough to provide a sense of who she is as a person and what her motivations are. Flo is apparently somewhat more traditionally nurturing than either of her daughters, and she is fiercely motivated by her convictions. She, unlike her husband, understands that her life does not have to be and should not be dictated by others, male or female. She is absolutely determined to live a content life, even if that means leaving her husband of many years or institutionalizing her truly unreachable daughter.

Just as the female characters are nontraditional, so too are the primary sexual and romantic situations within the film. Kay and Louis' relationship and Sweetie and Bob's relationship are both highly unconventional pairings that function in decidedly unusual ways. The couples certainly do not adhere to any kind of recognizable template, and their sexual relationships reflect that (D'Cruz, 7). From its beginnings, the relationship between Kay and Louis is already an uncommon and stereotype-defying arrangement. Film scholar Doreen D'Cruz notes that Campion is "refiguring the structural dynamics of

heterosexual desire rather than exploiting popular modes of depicting romantic love" (7). A female-initiated relationship that begins not with shy courtship but a domineering assertion of will is not the standard in classic or modern cinema, and rarely is it seen in other media, even in the midst of third- or possibly fourth-wave feminism. Louis is the subject of Kay's gaze; her opinion of and attraction to him dictate the relationship throughout the film, as per Campion's style. Particularly in regards to romance and sexuality, which are both stereotypically male-initiated and objectifying of women, she is the obvious decision-maker and overall authority.

The most significant example of this authority occurs when Louis attempts to plant an anniversary tree to commemorate their romance. Ignorant to Kay's phobia, he goes to great lengths to plant the young tree; this is meant as a romantic gesture, which

Image 4: Kay's rejection of the "anniversary tree"

she promptly denies. Despite his intentions, Kay's fear proves far too powerful. Her fears of trees and nature, which are curiously and deeply intertwined with her sexuality, render her disgusted. Because she is, as a result of this episode, no longer sexually attracted to Louis, the relationship falters. Despite his efforts later on, there can be no progress unless her opinions change, which only occurs at the end of the film as her intense fear of trees lessens.

In another scene, which is short but quite telling about the relationship's power dynamics, Louis is looking at a book reminiscent of the *Kama Sutra* that a female counselor has given him. Kay walks in, and he quickly but sheepishly returns the book, clearly intimidated by her judgmental look and generally discontented air. It is clear from this brief exchange that he is aware of the power Kay has over him, and he is desperately attempting to avoid further alienation from her, as she already is becoming more and more disenchanted with him after his mistake with the tree. Many times after this, Louis attempts to make sexual advances, and Kay repeatedly rejects him. When he suggests that they schedule an appointment for sex after Kay moves out of their bedroom, she says that it feels like they are siblings and ultimately, after they have both undressed, decides that the situation is too uncomfortable. Later on in the film, Sweetie arouses Louis by sexually licking his hands, and he crudely attempts the same strategy on Kay's leg as she is sleeping. Unfortunately, Louis can "manifest his…desire only in ways that inspire revulsion" in her, and, upon waking, Kay feels understandably disgusted by him (Polan, 104).

Campion undoubtedly created the character of Louis deliberately, using him as a vessel through which she could demonstrate the fallibility of even the most determined men within relationships where women's wills are dominant. In the inverse of Mulvey's claim about traditional romantic plots, Louis "falls in love with the… protagonist and becomes" her "property" (Mulvey, 721). Louis becomes passive and "a figure with little agency," gradually turning into a sulking and unenthusiastic character, reminiscent of a pouting child, refusing to dance with Kay and pretending not to hear people when they address him (Polan, 105). Eventually, their relationship does become more equal after the death of Sweetie and the demystification of her tree house and, by extension, trees. With less familial pressure and the tension surrounding her, Kay is able to relinquish some of her more destructive patterns of control and allow Louis to reenter her life in what could be called a probationary arrangement.

Within Sweetie and Bob's relationship, there are actually several similarities in regards to the dominance of the woman, though they are often difficult to observe because of Sweetie's extroversion and inherent otherness. From the moment they arrive at Kay's house, Sweetie is very open about her sex life with Bob and very raucously aggressive towards anyone attempting to quiet her emotions or impulses. Bob, who is unnervingly unresponsive and blank, is the clearly passive party within the relationship, if it should even be called that. Contemporary culture, as Feona Attwood says, portrays women merely as canvases for male fears, emotions, and fantasies (87). Campion completely reverses the situation in regards to Bob; Sweetie is clearly dominant, and Bob is an intentionally underdeveloped character who serves as little more than Sweetie's doll.

The differences in the two relationships become clear in terms of actual feelings. Sweetie has no emotional attachment to Bob or any sense of loyalty, as is evidenced by her overt advances towards Louis; Bob is merely a plaything that can easily be interchanged with someone else willing to follow her lead. But beyond the sexual aspects, it is clear that whatever nonsense Sweetie believes to be true about his role in the entertainment industry has been entirely fabricated by her. She so clearly inscribes her fantasies on Bob, arguably the only person who is vacant enough to accept her wildly delusional projections. After Gordon, who desperately wants to believe that Bob has some redeeming qualities, comically abandons him at a restaurant, Sweetie seems to barely notice. Shortly after, when Gordon, Louis, and Kay trick her into thinking that he is calling for her, she feels excitement but is ultimately unaffected when she realizes the truth.

Sweetie's personality and appearance remain unchanged after Bob's departure from her life; she has done nothing for his benefit and continues to act in a manner that exclusively benefits herself throughout the film. She is deeply and, because of her mental illness, ironically independent. Though she does not intentionally try to hurt others, barring her fits of rage, she is apparently devoid of the ability to be considerate or accommodating. She is unable or disinclined to bend her will to appease even her father, with whom she is very close—perhaps incestuously close, as McHugh suggests, citing the disturbing bathing scene and the almost surreal flashbacks that seem to imply a somewhat romantic affection (McHugh, 199). Whether or not this happened or triggered Sweetie's mental illness, it is clear that familial relations are not typical and certainly not calming to Sweetie when she has violent and frightening outbursts.

This is made evident particularly in the climax of the film; the camera unflinchingly captures the tension between a nude, paint-covered Sweetie refusing to come down from her tree house and her family anxiously telling her that her actions are not safe. In this situation, the nudity, though female, is so dramatically nonsexual and so far removed from anything that could be called the "phantasy" of the male gaze that it does not seem remotely objectifying (Mulvey, 719). Sweetie's behavior, however, is noteworthy; her actions are quite disturbing as, when the young neighbor boy joins her,

Image 5: Sweetie and the neighborhood boy in her tree house

she puts both of their lives in jeopardy and is seemingly completely oblivious. She then actively tries to make Gordon fall from a ladder, all the while screaming "Drop and break your bloody neck!" She feels no societal pressure to suppress her anger and, free from any qualms, expresses it openly in dramatic and explosive ways. Here Campion displays a kind of flouting of social expectations of women; Sweetie, in addition to these

unrestricted displays of emotion, also seems to have no concept of—or, more likely, no concern regarding—"ladylike" behavior, which Campion also clearly cares relatively little about.

The film, in appearance, characters, and content, is quite an unusual spectacle, but it nonetheless conveys Campion's authorial intentions without any question. The three primary female characters that she creates are executed as exquisitely unique and three-dimensional figures that fit into no stereotypical category and, therefore, defy all expectations. The story, as seen primarily through the eyes of the most withdrawn character, Kay, is highly representative of the female gaze for which Campion is known,

Image 6: Louis as the subject of the female gaze

and the consistency of this trend both serves to prove her feminist auteurism and provide a clear alternative to the all-too-common male gaze that dominates classic and modern

cinema cultures. In *Sweetie*, Campion establishes a precedent for unusual female characters, an emphasis on female sexuality, and a subtle emphasis on woman's intertwinement with nature that continues throughout her films.

The next film that truly encompasses Campion's auteurist capabilities and her ideological patterns is her Academy Award-winning drama, *The Piano*. When a director chooses two middle-aged actors to be romantic leads in a period piece about a mute woman, there will inevitably be curiosity in the film community; in mainstream filmmaking, sex is typically reserved for only the young and beautiful. Shirking stereotypes regarding who is viewed as worthy of romantic attention is one of the most direct routes to drawing attention to the issue of why there are even canonical and social guidelines that dictate this kind of bizarre discrimination. However, as in the case of *Sweetie*, Campion did not stop at unconventional cinematic romance; there are, again, subverted gender stereotypes, a female protagonist, and explicit female-initiated sexuality. These aspects are interwoven with the already intriguing plot and absolutely stunning filmmaking, and while these facets won the film its critical acclaim and financial success, the previously mentioned aspects make it worth consideration as a work by a feminist auteur.

In what is undoubtedly her most mainstream work, Jane Campion presents audiences with an example of the female gaze, complete with understated but extremely powerful feminist characters that both contradict and draw attention to the traditional representation of women in Hollywood. The first and most obvious of these is Ada, a mute woman that is played to great acclaim by Holly Hunter. Ada, along with her daughter, Flora (Anna Paquin), are sent to New Zealand from their homeland of Scotland

so that Ada can enter into an arranged marriage with a man she's never met. Upon their meeting, this man, Alisdair (Sam Neill), is uncomfortable with her muteness and her strong-willed insistence on her piano being transported with her. He refuses, despite her silent but powerful outbursts, and a strong sense of resentment builds immediately. They are soon married in a dismally unhappy and isolated ceremony, and Ada looks for routes to reunite with her piano. She finds this route through a man named George Baines, portrayed by Harvey Keitel. He puts the piano in his house and arranges for what are called "piano lessons" to take place regularly.

These meetings quickly go far beyond Ada's sexual comfort zone, and she becomes more and more hostile towards Baines, until he finally calls off the arrangement. At this point, she begins to feel emotions for him, and a secret relationship begins. Eventually, largely because of Flora's anger towards her mother, Alisdair finds out about the affair and imprisons Ada within their home. When he finally releases her, she goes back to Baines, and Alisdair punishes her by cutting off one of her fingers. After he finally sees that she will never love him, he gives up, and Ada, Baines, and Flora leave together.

Like *Sweetie*, this film also rejects one of the most significant prerequisites for the "male gaze," having a central male protagonist—an indicator that Campion was simply not interested in aligning with traditional standards. This rejection of tradition can be seen in almost every facet of the film, including cinematography; in her essay, "Mired In Desire: Jane Campion's Portrait Of Erotics," Tiel Lundy asserts that "One of Campion's many contributions to feminist filmmaking is the way in which she uses… cinematography to engage and mediate film's conventionally gendered vision of the

female body" (213). The words "engage" and "mediate" here are interesting, because they imply both that Campion is an auteur and that she deliberately responds to the antifeminist techniques of standard Hollywood productions, which indeed is the case. Paralleling *Sweetie* exactly, the film starts with a voiceover narration by Ada, establishing the significance and dominance of her character before she is fully visible. Immediately, it is clear that Ada is not limited to being a female body, but rather she is the character that determines on what the story and camera will focus, as male characters generally do. In this case, the camera endlessly swirls around and captures Ada, depicting not only actions, but also a sense of her energy and power (Polan, 29). However, the camera is never used to demonstrate a sexualization of Ada, despite its constant focus on her and her movements; even in sexual situations, there is not an emphasis on the "female body."

A particularly clear example of the female-dictated focus takes place early on in the film when Ada is separated from her piano, despite her unsuppressed rage directed towards Alisdair. When Alisdair arrives and attempts to convey a sense of authority, his overbearing personality is established; for a brief time, he becomes the primary focus as he struts around the beach and gives orders. However, immediately after Ada and Alisdair's first interaction, which is mediated by Flora, Ada's daughter, there is a clear indication of who is the dominant figure. Alisdair essentially disappears, and the camera focuses tightly on Ada staring off a cliff, looking down at her piano. Though there is a close up shot of her face, it is in no way meant to be sexual in nature and is, as in the case of male protagonists, rather expository in that it allows the viewers to access her

Image 7: Ada staring longingly at her piano

thoughts and emotions. From this arc shot, which circles her face, showing her contempt and longing, we are granted a glimpse of the willful and convicted character she will continually prove herself to be, despite her situation. Additionally, it has been suggested that this longing is perhaps romantic, or even sexual, in nature because of her deep connection to her music and the lack of tactile contact that she experiences without her piano (Polan, 27). This assumption, based on primarily just this arc shot, helps to explain Ada's despair at being separated and also somewhat foreshadows her later sexual entanglements, which could otherwise seem unrealistic because of her distant demeanor around everyone, excluding Flora.

Scenes that focus exclusively on Ada and Flora are also quite notable in this context of the female gaze. The purity of their relationship is something that is not typically explored in traditional, male-gaze focused cinema. Female characters, even if

they are mothers, must remain two dimensional, lest the audience should be inclined to identify with them and thereby ruin the objectification. In this case, however, Campion makes no attempt to shield viewers from the motherly affection that Ada feels, nor the admiration that Flora has for her. When the two are alone, they are always very close together, clearly displaying a meaningful bond; even if the two are not framed in the same shot, it is apparent that they maintain this closeness. However, when men come into these scenes, this sense of intimacy immediately fades.

During the scene in which Ada and Flora are communicating about Flora's father, the two stay very close together but are clearly uncomfortable once Alisdair enters the room. Ada stops signing and quickly lays down, as though she has been doing something forbidden. The room goes silent, and the pair averts their eyes away from Alisdair, who stays firmly isolated in his own frame, never daring to enter into their space. Their moment of bonding comes to an abrupt halt but restarts the moment he leaves. Their isolated world ceases to be private, and the almost mystical way in which they communicate is made nearly impossible with this intrusion of an outsider, someone who is unable to understand Ada. Similarly, when Flora cannot persuade her mother to stay with her instead of visiting Baines, she gets very angry, despite her dislike of Alisdair. About this mother-daughter division, Attwood writes, "The scenes in which Ada 'teaches' Baines to play the piano are important in establishing the terms of this encounter between a woman and a man, which marks a split between Ada and Flora and a departure from their shared world" (Attwood, 92). Flora isn't upset that her mother is cheating on her husband; she feels betrayed because of her mother's allowance of a male figure into her intimate life. Until this point, Flora and Ada's relationship is the most secret and

meaningful of all. There is a kind of mysticism about their bond, and it surfaces only when they are left alone together, illustrating the complexity and power of feminine relationships.

As the film progresses, it becomes more and more apparent that this feminist viewpoint is the intention of the film's auteur, Jane Campion, as the nontraditional use of nudity, realistic sexuality, and Campion's signature female-initiated intimacy become prominent aspects. This is wholly contrary to the standard filmmaking expectations, as described by Laura Mulvey, who states, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure… Women are…coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 719). Though Mulvey believes that this kind of projecting should be abandoned entirely in cinematic work, Campion instead deliberately uses the female gaze to create a feminist statement. Within the film, the male gaze is consistently met with contempt or openly criticized via Jane Campion's female gaze-centered filmmaking. When Alisdair watches Ada and Baines during their most passionate "piano lesson," a dog comically licks his hand, something he doesn't notice for quite some time. Later, Ada drops a button through the floorboards onto Alisdair's chest. Campion, in this scene, calls attention to the bizarreness of Alisdair's fetishization of other people's sexuality. Because of this recognition, Alisdair appears to viewers to be both desperate and perverse, further distancing him from the audience's potential sympathy. Rather than storming into the house and stopping the two from continuing, as would be expected, he continues to look, something that Laura Mulvey specifically critiques in filmmaking. This "looking" is the cardinal sin of the film

industry, but Campion seems, in both *Sweetie* and *The Piano*, to believe that the constant *male* "looking" is in fact the greatest transgression.

In this film, the character of George Baines, played by Harvey Keitel, is instead the primary vulnerable character, the character that possesses the "to-be-looked-at-ness." Though he specifically creates a situation in the film so that he may watch Ada, she is not meant to be the *object* of desire. She is desired by several men, but the roundness of her character and the adamant persistency of her will makes her far more than an object, particularly in the eyes of the men who attempt to control her. Especially in the iconic and often discussed scene in which Baines, rather sensually, cleans the piano while completely nude, there is no question about the voyeuristic intentions of Jane Campion in

Image 8: Baines cleaning the piano

regards to the sexualization of Baines, rather than Ada. This indication that the audience should be looking at Baines as a sexual figure is striking not because of the nudity itself

but because of the unfamiliarity of the intent; rarely is male nudity used for sexual objectification as female nudity is. In her essay, "Tempestuous Petticoats: Costume and Desire in *The Piano*," Stella Bruzzi writes that in general, "the act of looking is closely affiliated with men and the expression of masculine sexuality," but this film is different simply because it implements what she calls "a simple inversion of the normative process addresses the question of what happens when the agent of the gaze is female and its object the male body" (Bruzzi 261). The fact that Jane Campion, in this film, recognized and rejected the commonality of frivolous female nudity is quite telling about the film as a political statement piece. Had she been interested in maintaining the widely accepted norms of the cinematic world, the scene instead would have had a nude Holly Hunter cleaning, or more likely playing, the piano. Rather, she chose to have a scene of fragmented male nudity, intentionally choosing to not explain herself or offer clear justifications.

A film created in a Mulvey-inspired fashion would be less notable for its gender representation, as it would have no gaze at all—if such a thing were possible. If Campion had attempted this goal of having no gaze, the emotional qualities of the film would be greatly diminished; the viewers would have little to hope for or fear and no characters to easily identify with. Additionally, the characters, regardless of gender, would have to act in similar fashions, so as not to promote or condemn gender roles. In Mulvey's view, the lack of a gaze would be ideal, but it seems that, especially after the emergence of third-wave feminism, this kind of impractical, nonpolitical approach would render films completely empty of emotion and eroticism. What Campion does is create a feminist gaze

that instead leads viewers to question and consider gender representation in traditional films, which are seemingly unable to stray from the omnipresent male gaze.

In addition to this nontraditional use of nudity, the equally unusual use of realistic sex scenes should also be noted. When Ada and Baines finally form and consummate a relationship, there is almost no sound, barring the omnipresent piano music. There is no attempt to make the encounter more dramatic or thrilling by having the actors behave unrealistically. Their actions, which are romantic and erotic without being shocking, and sounds, which are soft and understated, are at least seemingly organic and extremely believable. Campion herself chalks this realism up largely to historical accuracy and the inevitable naivety of individuals existing in a largely repressed society. She said of the subject, "I have enjoyed writing characters who don't have a twentieth-century sensibility about sex. We've grown up with so many expectations that the erotic impulse is almost lost to us, but these characters have nothing to prepare them for its strength and power" (Attwood, 95). These "expectations" are specifically the causes of the generalized and wholly unoriginal sex scenes in most modern filmmaking; by creating characters that are unfamiliar with norms, Campion was able to skip the conventions that normally dictate these scenes and instead focus on the characters' behaviors.

The questionable and undoubtedly sexist MPAA's R rating and label of "extremely graphic sexual content," which almost certainly would not be present if not for this realism and male full-frontal nudity, also give a clear indication of just how rare these kinds of risks are in modern filmmaking. However, it seems that this warning does more than just bring to light the sexist practices of Hollywood censors: it also actively diminishes the significance of the very deliberately planned sexuality and nudity in this

film. Baines' nudity presents to the audience a willingness of vulnerability that would not have previously been expected of his outwardly gruff and seemingly unfeeling persona; and later, the clear and simplistic statements made by his nudity are akin to Ada's expressions, making their communication more similarly basic and unmarred by words. However, because of a shock factor that apparently renders censors blind to meaning, the film comes with a reputation of being somehow scandalous, when Campion actually used nudity in quite a valuable way, rather than to draw in audiences looking for scandal or eroticism.

Female characters, which are traditionally what Mulvey labels "exhibitionist" characters, typically follow these societal or individual rules that they are meant to obey. They take the same paths time and time again, leading to their loss of individuality and, ultimately sexual power. About standard female characters Mulvey asserts, as mentioned briefly earlier, "As the narrative progresses she falls in love with the… protagonist and becomes his property… Her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification…the spectator can indirectly possess her too" (Mulvey, 721). In this narrative, however, it should be argued that it is George Baines that experiences this change and relative loss of agency, much like the character of Louis in *Sweetie*. When Ada becomes interested in him, she initially—and familiarly—dictates the terms of their relationship, and through this power shift, Baines' gender stereotypes are shattered. He is put briefly into a passive and dependent position that mirrors the stereotypes of femininity (Polan, 40). After Ada turns her sexual attention towards Baines, he can no longer assert the same level of power over her. Eventually, however, his sexual power becomes equivalent to hers as they become equal partners. In this way, the film is both

noting the way that women are normally portrayed in films and rejecting the stereotypes of both genders.

The open and frequent sexuality in this film is also quite revelatory, but in this case, it is telling about the specific female characters' internal desires and power. And, importantly, there is no attempt to portray them as lesser characters because of these desires, which are not necessarily associated with romantic feelings. Of this inversion of traditional sexuality in film, Jane Campion says, "I think it's amusing because more often you see women who are looking for an emotional relationship with men, while men think only about sex. Here, Ada is the one who has an erotic temperament, which is interesting" (Campion, 130). When Ada recognizes Alisdair as a means for her sexual exploration, he—much like Baines— takes on this "to-be-looked-at-ness." It could be argued that her actions are motivated primarily by her desire to be free from the makeshift prison that he creates, but the prior events and revelations about her character suggest a different reason for her actions. Her own sexuality awakened, she suddenly recognizes Alisdair as the only available candidate for sexual experimentation and treats him as such. Jane Campion specifically discusses this in a 1993 interview:

> In doing that (touching Alisdair), she is thinking of Baines, but above all her own eroticism. The whole process of the piano lessons has eroticized her. It reveals her sexuality even if she thinks she's resisting it. It's the most certain way to seduce someone when he is not aware of a deeper motivation. Of course Ada has a sexuality, but she had repressed it at a certain level…When she caresses Sam (Neill), she's searching for herself.

> Usually it's the opposite that happens: women often have the impression of being treated as objects by their men. (Campion, 109)

Ada has no intention of maintaining an intimate relationship—and certainly not a romantic relationship—with him, but she merely uses him for her own enjoyment. Because of this, Alisdair, as Attwood puts it, "cannot accept Ada's caresses…her curiosity and desire appall him. Ada's voice, look and desire function for Stewart merely as disturbances and obstacles which demand to be tamed, contained or cast out" (95). Ada is the one with which the audience is meant to identify, and the fact that Alisdair garners such little sympathy from viewers in this moment solidifies that Campion succeeded in fostering this identification with Ada. Despite her truthfully selfish behavior, Alisdair remains the antagonist; though his character is more relatable and

Image 9: Alisdair attempting to rape Ada in the forest

human in this instance, the tendency to side with Ada over him is still certainly present. There are other situations when there is no question of the morally incorrect side: when Alisdair chases and tries to rape her in the woods—which is thwarted by trees that serve as a sharp contrast to those in *Sweetie*—and when he maniacally chops off her finger. In these situations, Alisdair is in control, and the audience feels a deep resentment, both because of the obvious villainous actions of Alisdair and also because the audience, at this late point in the film, inevitably identifies with the heroine, Ada.

In the case of the relationship between Baines and Ada, the power dynamics are obviously more complex; he is introduced in a vaguely heroic light as he rescues her piano from the beach, but his almost immediate turn to exploitation leads the audience to view him as just another male antagonist. Cinema scholar Dana Polan explores these exploitative actions and recognizes the resulting issues that many critics have with the film.

> Initially, Baines's own negotiations to gain the piano and through it to capture Ada can seem like further forms of other men's domination of her (her father, her husband). Indeed, Baines's machinations to possess Ada have led some critics of the film to see its narrative…as one more rendition of women desiring their own domination. (35)

However, this power structure is not stagnant during the film. If Ada were to grow to appreciate the masochistic relationship that develops and eventually resigns to a life of submission, then this idea of "women desiring their own domination" would perhaps be valid. But this is not the case. Ada does not follow this submissive path but rather has a deep resentment for the "bargain" that the two form and makes her position known, at no

point giving in to a life of subservience. Even when the initial proposition is made, she responds with complete annoyance and disgust, attempting to leave. But when she stops to think about the idea of "one visit for every key," she clearly reconsiders and instead offers one visit for every black key, which Baines accepts. Attwood, who primarily studies sexual cultures, discusses this rule-governed arrangement, remarking on the power structure that it denotes:

> While it is Baines who initiates this bargaining system it is Ada who elaborates the complex system of rules which govern the detail and currency of the bargain; when and at what Baines may look, what touching will be permitted, what value each action will carry (reckoned in black keys- when they are all used up the piano will be hers). This is a private and unusual negotiation which avoids conventional structures of voyeuristic male gazing. (Attwood, 92)

Even in times of desperation, Ada, like *Sweetie*'s Kay, consistently wants and asserts control over her own life, making calculated sacrifices for her eventual, personal gain. Though the situation is initially exploitative and manipulative, she doesn't let anything happen without her input or continued bargaining, such as her insistence that arm touching counts as two keys. At this point in the narrative, Ada's romance is with her piano. Regarding her beneficially calculative nature when it comes to this romance, Campion states, "Ada's problem is that she's too stubborn, she's romantic to the point of being so involved in her ideals that she could die for them. In order to live, it's necessary to make compromises with one's ideals" (Campion, 110).

It seems unusual for a feminist film to feature a relationship that started in the manner that this one does, but the way in which it becomes a flirtation and, eventually, a healthy and equal relationship is actually quite feminist in nature. Ada rejects Baines' affection beyond what she feels she must do in order to win back her piano, and only after he decides to discontinue the bargain does she evaluate her own desires. Prior to the relative equalization of the two characters, she is completely annoyed by and uninterested in being an active part of his sexual fantasies, an attitude she maintains with Alisdair throughout the entire film, even when touching him. Because of what Polan recognizes as Ada's "increasing assumption of control over her fate and a concomitant weakening of that masculine power that had assumed it could decide matters for her," she should not be viewed as a woman looking to be dominated; nothing in any of her actions point to a willingness, and certainly not a *desire*, to follow rules or guidelines that are laid out for her by male figures (Polan, 35).

She is still disgusted by Alisdair's attempts to kiss or reciprocally touch her even while she explores his body, asserting her control. And only after she is free from any kind of expectations from Baines does she find herself attracted to him. At that point, she is able to realize that he is similar to her in that he also does not follow society's expectations for him. Additionally, his total willingness to let her completely be herself and leave him intrigues her. Everyone else in her life is reliant on her showing affection, and he is completely accepting of her rejection, even wanting to distance himself. Because of this, Ada suddenly appreciates Baines and his newfound understanding of her and her needs. It seems that, because neither has any expectations of or—most importantly—a desire to possess the other, the possibility of a relationship becomes a

realistic idea in Ada's mind. Only then does she begin to turn her attention to her own desires, which initially conflict with anger at Baines for his previous behavior. After hitting him and becoming upset, she finally acts on her desires, and Baines accepts both of these actions with understanding and an appreciation of her honesty.

It should also be noted that Ada's actions at this point harken back to what she tells Flora about her father. She says that they didn't need to speak, that she could "lay thoughts out in his mind like a sheet." This point of the film where Ada asserts her feelings towards Baines signifies the beginning of a similar relationship in which she uses actions, rather than words, to communicate her emotions. This is a stereotypically unfeminine thing to do, as women are presumed to be less physical than men. Ada, however, does not have the option to speak when wishing to convey feelings, and she therefore becomes more stereotypically masculine by becoming the dominant sexual figure in their relationship.

Further proving the significance of the female sexuality in the film are the characters of Flora and the Maori women. When Flora is caught playing with the Maori children and pretending to kiss and rub against the ever-significant trees, Alisdair forces her to then scrub the tree. Though she is a child, the male figure in her life is suppressing her because of a perceived improperness of her behavior, based at least partially on her gender. Alisdair's embarrassment and violent reaction—"Never behave like that! Never, anywhere! You are greatly shamed, and you have shamed those trunks"—implies that what Flora is doing is unclean and somehow morally incorrect, whereas the Maori adults are completely accepting of their children's playing, even mocking Alisdair and Flora.

Image 10: Flora mimics the Maori children by kissing the trees

This arguably serves as a critique by Jane Campion of specifically European and European-inspired gender roles and the obsessive suppression of sexuality. Because of Flora's background and Alisdair's perception of her as being apart of an apparently higher status than the Maori children, she is limited in her activities.

The Maori women also serve to contrast these European standards by displaying complete indifference and even amusement towards their own children's playing. This openness can also be seen in their continuous and blunt advances towards Baines. They tell him to marry, so that his "treasure" will not go to waste or "sulk" at night. Seeing this behavior from someone like Ada would be unthinkable, but as she grows comfortable with her newfound sexuality, she begins to act, though obviously never speak, more freely regarding her sexual desires, much like the Maori women. Though they do not interact with each other very often during the film, it is clear that Ada is influenced by

these women—in a likely unintentional nod to similar plots, such as the one in *Heart of Darkness*—through her contact with Baines, who is essentially an acting member of their society. Just as he rejects the societal role that he is supposed to fill, Ada's own rebellion grows to include her sexual openness, as is indirectly inspired by the various Maori women.

Another aspect of the film that points to feminist undertones is Ada's muteness and her infallible willpower. "I always saw her as someone who had very powerfully removed herself from life," Campion says about Ada's elective muteness (Campion, 116). Ada, based on the evidence that is given by Campion, is a relatively reliable narrator, and when she claims that she herself doesn't even know why she stopped speaking, there is no reason to doubt her. However, assumptions can be made and analysis done to determine the actual cause of her silence. In context, the most obvious inference to be made is that it is a form of rebellion and an assertion of dominance, and this assumption has quite a bit of logic to it. If this is the case, Ada shows what Polan calls "feminine resistance by not speaking the language of her father" (Polan, 32). Particularly because of her preference of signing, using eye contact, and playing her piano to communicate, rather than through writing, it seems that her silence is largely based on the language itself, rather than actual spoken word. Words do not suit her needs, and she is unable to use or receive them in meaningful ways for most of the film. When Baines asks if she loves him, she stops looking at herself in the mirror—an activity she takes up following her sexual encounter—and begins to kiss him again. She is completely able to function in the relationships she wishes to maintain, even without the standard use of words.

Image 11: Ada as Baines expresses his love

Just as she, like Sweetie, refutes the norms of femininity in her behavior by actively rebelling and freely showing her anger, she also increasingly refuses the norms of civilization, in general (Thornham, 18). At the beginning of the film, only in a state of deep frustration does Ada use written language to convey her points. But even then, her emotions are clear without language. As the film progresses, she finds that no words are needed to communicate with Baines once they are on equal ground. Because of his illiteracy and their generally wordless connection, she has no need to write anything. However, when Alisdair separates them, she not only writes to Baines, but she uses a piano key as her writing surface. This is significant because she is willing to enter into the realm of normality in order to communicate her desires. At this point, she releases a small amount of her grudge with society and compromises her lifelong values to communicate with Baines.

Though Ada's action seems somewhat useless, as Baines is unable to read, the act of deconstructing her piano in order to correspond with him signifies a serious shift in her priorities. This is also quite telling because of a quick but powerful image Campion provides earlier in the film: the engraved initials of Ada and her past love on another piano key. Only in this one other situation has Ada been willing to disturb the sanctity of her instrument and, more importantly, her own silence, and that she feels strongly enough to separate herself from both her past and from her piano is an emotionally potent clue about how deeply her emotions run for Baines. To simultaneously compromise her muteness and desecrate her, until this point, one source of tactile comfort indicates a very deliberate change in Ada's relationship with language; she stops seeing it as the tool of the oppressor and begins to view it as a tool of her own feminine rebellion. She actively disobeys Alisdair's nonsensical and tyrannical rules with the very weapon he uses against her: language.

This trajectory continues through the rest of the film; from the initial rejection of her piano in favor of language, there is a clear change in Ada. She considers surrendering her life to the force of nature after plunging in the ocean with her piano, but her recent discovery of this new power prevents her from doing so; though she clearly considers death as an option, she cares enough about life, Baines, and her newfound freedom to separate herself from her closest ally, her piano. Her attempts to speak in what could be called the epilogue further prove this acceptance of this language that she once considered to be her enemy and also her overall contentment with her situation. Ada no longer has a reason to rebel; she is not suppressed, and her life has a newly discovered gender equality that allows her to express herself without betraying her beliefs. This

conclusion, therefore, should not be viewed as a resignation on Ada's part or a moral-ridden tale of a man rescuing a woman, because that is not the case.

Image 12: Ada deciding whether to resurface or remain with her piano

Throughout the film, including during the epilogue, Ada's willpower is the dominant force; no other aspect of the film is more responsible for the advancement of the narrative or the progression of Ada's awakening. The events that occur are direct results of her willfulness, be it positive or negative. Without her active and forceful advances towards Baines after he tells her to leave, the two would have never been together. And most notably, without her powerful will, she would have been a victim of Alisdair's misogynistic and, bluntly, evil behavior.

> When he attempts to rape her a second time, while she is sleeping, it is her look which stops him. It is also her look which makes him listen to her and let her go. And as he watcher her his face transforms; his eyes fill, his lips

> soften, and his eyebrows take on the exact expression of her own. Stewart mirrors Ada here for the first time, instead of turning her into his mirror. He suffers her look and hears her for the first time. (Attwood, 95)

Because of her determination, she is able to convey her emotions without any movement or sound. Alisdair is seemingly taken out of the trance he has been in, and he finally recognizes her intense humanity and willful power. From the moment Ada looks at herself in Baines' mirror, she too recognizes her power. From this point, the increase in her actions that are dictated by her desires and feelings is very recognizable and notable as a tenet of the feminist world that Campion creates.

As can be seen, the film is a potent deviation from the stereotypical and formulaic love stories of modern cinema. Auteur Jane Campion clearly strove to tell a story from the clear perspective of a woman, and every facet of the film reflects this goal; from the use of nudity to Ada's personal qualities, the signs of feminist filmmaking are unavoidable. The flouting of the conventional male gaze in favor of a decidedly female gaze is not a common practice and even more seldom a practice that receives critical acclaim and commercial success. In true auteur fashion, Campion produced her vision in the most true and powerful way possible and, in this case, somehow pleased the masses—excluding the unreasonably sexist MPAA. The representation of women as more than just "female bodies" to serve as props to men should be commonplace in the time of third-wave feminism, which focuses largely on abolishing gender expectations, and the existence of the Bechdel test, which, in fiction, requires two named female characters to discuss a topic that is unrelated to a man or men in general. Nonetheless, this isn't the case. The number of women-led casts is still low, as are the statistics of mainstream

female directors. However, this film represents one victory. The female gaze is uncompromised by industry standards or an unintentionally intrusive male director. And though it seems from the outside to be a standard period piece, this film is secretly quite an oddity, even twenty-three years after its release.

Finally, Campion's most recently completed project, the first season of the BBC series, *Top of the Lake*, only confirms what has previously been asserted in regards to her feminist auteur status, despite the difference in format. With Campion as executive producer, writer, and director, the seven episodes chronicle the investigation of twelve-year old Tui Mitcham (Jacqueline Joe), who attempts suicide or, possibly, an abortion after her sexual assault and resulting pregnancy. She subsequently disappears into the forests that dominate that region of New Zealand, and a search begins. Detective Robin

Image 13: Tui wading into the freezing waters

Griffin, played by Elisabeth Moss, is a native of the town who is visiting her mother. Robin, as she leads the search, inadvertently discovers the widespread and tangled system of lies and corruption both in the town and police department. Considered fragile and overly sensitive because she is both a woman and a survivor of sexual assault, she is frequently dismissed by her male colleagues and must work primarily alone to find Tui and uncover her abuser.

Nearby, a small, cult-like group forms, providing shelter and what could be called "counsel" for abused, troubled, and discontented women who wish to flee their traditional lives. The leader, a strange and ethereal woman named GJ—portrayed by Holly Hunter—is largely unresponsive or cryptic in her interactions, providing an air of mystery that draws in a variety of women, briefly including Tui. After eventually running away from the group, Tui ultimately survives her extended time in the wilderness and miraculously gives birth to her child without any assistance. Following the birth, Tui indirectly leads Robin to the father, who is revealed to be Al Parker, the detective sergeant and Robin's former confidant.

As with *Sweetie*, Campion shares writing credits with friend Gerard Lee, and she, as the series' show runner, also occasionally allocates directorial duties to Garth Davis. However, Campion in no way compromises her ideals, effectively conveying her themes through the powerful women that serve as the series' heroines. Even with these collaborations, Campion produces a clear and "thrilling example of auteurist episodic television," complete with apparent markers of Campion's style and frequently featured themes, including female sexuality, an emphasis on nature, and female protagonists presenting a sense of the female gaze (Taubin, 76). By harkening back to plot devices

used and topics explored in her past projects, Campion reinforces her own auteur image while simultaneously promoting her powerful feminist beliefs.

The pilot episode, which introduces Tui, sets up both the role of the natural world and the clear female gaze. Tui wades calmly into the frigid waters of the local lake, her intentions reminiscent of other feminist works, including Kate Chopin's *The Awakening (1899)* and, of course, *The Piano.* Once again, there is a direct emphasis on a female protagonist taking very direct and deliberate control over her destiny and asserting her strong will. However, much like Campion's Ada, Tui makes the decision to live. Despite her forced lack of agency in the matter of her pregnancy, she is acutely aware of her capacity to control her fate in the aftermath. Quiet but intelligent, Tui has developed exemplary survival skills and adheres to few societal expectations regarding her femininity. Threatening her father with a gun, living alone in the wilderness, surviving a wholly unaided childbirth, and eventually killing her father are just a few of the behaviors that clearly put Tui into the category of unusual female protagonists that Campion specializes in.

The lake itself, an interesting, almost character-like figure within the narrative, serves as a central location and tool for plot advancement. The ocean in *The Piano* serves as the route towards Ada's captivity and a route out of it: either by death or by emigration. Similarly, the lake in this series serves as a constant reminder of loss and escape. The lake, to Tui and the other locals, is a readily accessible method for escape; suicide, abortion, and the outright murder of a man all are possible and at least attempted during the course of the series. Cinematographically, the lake is cast in a very dark light, appearing to constantly lurk in the background of the character's lives. Michael Sicinski,

a writer for the film magazine *Cinema Scope*, likens the fear-inducing nature of the lake to the feminine power that so often intimidates men in Campion's works. About the lake, he writes:

> Not only is the lake itself a cold, deep gaping wound at the heart of the town—a vaguely feminine symbol which strikes fear and awe in most of the characters…but, surrounded as it is by high hills and thickets of uncleared Outback, it is also the area's ultimate proving ground, a place where dominant men assert their will, make lesser men "disappear," and still others hide away completely. (Sicinski)

Like the trees in both *Sweetie* and *The Piano*, the town's forests—in addition to its lake—provide an additional layer of visible and emotional complexity that cannot be equally expressed through the words and actions of human characters. The forests, in this case, represent and reflect the constant, palpable sense of the secrecy that permeates the town and its people. Tui is only able to find solitude and safety within the confines of the forest, where she is able to remain out of reach from those trying to find her. Tui's abusive and misogynistic father, Matt (Peter Mullan), carries out his bizarre and ritualistic self-punishment at his mother's grave amongst the trees. Robin's cautious and relatively secret relationship with Johnno (Thomas M. Wright)—who is initially believed to be Tui's half brother—begins and continues to find its strength within the forest. The only people who are not inclined to take advantage of its concealing powers are the members of GJ's cult and GJ herself.

The group's function is almost as a recovery from this kind of suppression and secrecy, and their behavior and living situation in no way mirror the townspeople's

habits. Empowering and nonsexual nudity, pride in their bodies and emotions, and loud and boisterous laughter characterize the women. Just as Campion unflinchingly showcased the decidedly "unladylike" behavior of Sweetie, Kay, Ada, and Flora, she again makes no attempt to make these women socially acceptable or more palatable for male viewers. The "post-menopausal" expression of bodily confidence and the resulting sense of freedom fit quite clearly into Campion's use of the female gaze, which is uninterested in the sexual value of the female form. Whereas in conventional cinema—and television, in this case—there is the tendency to "play" on the audience's "voyeuristic phantasy," this series follows in line with Campion's tendency to "play" with the expectations of audiences and the uses of exhibition (Mulvey 717). The camera does not avert its focus based on the presence of nude, nontraditionally attractive people; instead, it actively seeks out this kind of cinematic anomaly and, through Campion's guidance, works to humanize rather than objectify the women.

Geneviève Lemon of *Sweetie* notoriety again appears, playing one of GJ's followers, a woman named Bunny. Though her repetitive casting serves as a clear example of Campion's auteurist tendencies, Lemon brings to this series another meaningful, Sweetie-esque character, in regards to sexual assertiveness. At one point, Bunny, who is one of the initial members of the cult, goes into town and announces to the patrons of a bar that she is actively seeking to pay for sex. One man accepts her strange offer and follows her to a rented room, where she immediately establishes the power dynamics by insisting on his showering, deciding on his actions, and even setting a timer that he is meant to obey. Once again, a male character is shown fully nude, whereas Bunny, who is arguably more active in her sexual role, remains clothed. Though neither

of the actors are the standard types who typically engage in onscreen sex, the man is portrayed as the clear object of sexual objectification. This sexual partner of Bunny's is not meant to represent anyone or anything to her or the audience. His body is his only

Image 14: Geneviève Lemon's Bunny establishing her rules

relevant asset, and Campion unapologetically showcases it as a sexual object, even having his towel fall and Bunny deny him the right to pick it back up. Again, unflinchingly, the camera follows along as Bunny assumes the traditionally male role, as defined by Mulvey; she dictates the gaze and creates the action (720). In this scenario, the typical assignment of the female as the prop and the male as the character playing with the prop is blatantly and jarringly reversed, perhaps more clearly than in the aforementioned films.

Another jarring aspect of this encounter is Bunny's desire; it is completely devoid of a romantic motive and focuses entirely on her satisfaction. Her expectations are those

of someone looking for a few moments of pleasure without lasting consequences, and she makes no attempt to shamefully hide these expectations. Like this nudity and the nudity of Baines in *The Piano,* the intent is more startling than the events. Women's lusts and desires are sometimes—when censors allow them—seen in mainstream cinema, but they are almost always accompanied by ulterior motives or malicious intent. The "temptress" and "evil incarnate" types that were earlier discussed often have quite a bit of overlap and lead to the demonization of sexually assertive women. Female sexuality is traditionally something associated with duplicity in media and literature, even from Biblical times; "Eve…represents female desire—with the well-known consequence of being expelled from the Garden of Eden." (Arnfred, 151-152). Campion continually and wholly refutes this still-rampant stigma, replacing the negative intentions and results with feminine ownership of desires and a removal of the effects' typical dramatization; the characters are not banned permanently from their personal Gardens of Eden.

American film critic Amy Taubin argues that, in all situations of female willpower and decision-making, which together make up the foundation of this series, there is a stereotypical "fear that bedevils female agency" (76). Robin, the primary protagonist and ultimate heroine of the story, faces this kind of ignorant fear when dealing with almost every man involved in the case. The emphasis on her constant discrimination presents a frustratingly realistic example of the female gaze and the obstacles that accompany this kind of perspective. This could come only from a female auteur who knows, as a woman in a traditionally male industry, of the struggles associated with male-dominated fields. Robin's fellow detectives belittle her attempts to lead the investigation, and they thwart her efforts to uproot the town's traditions in order

to find Tui and her attacker. A seeming outlier among these men is Al (David Wenham), who appears to be the most cooperative of the group; however, he suppresses Robin's agency in a different but more insidious way. By flirting and even proposing to her, he maintains the sense of friendliness that he strives to achieve, and he also prevents her from actively discussing the case with him. By treating Robin as a sexual or romantic interest, rather than a coworker, he diminishes her importance and allows for the dismissal of her complaints and requests. Because of Al's power over Robin, as a result of their boss-employee relationship, she is uninterested. Until the last episode, Robin is completely unaware of Al's pedophilic behavior; nonetheless, because of his understated oppressive tendencies, she cannot be attracted to him. Interestingly, Al bears some

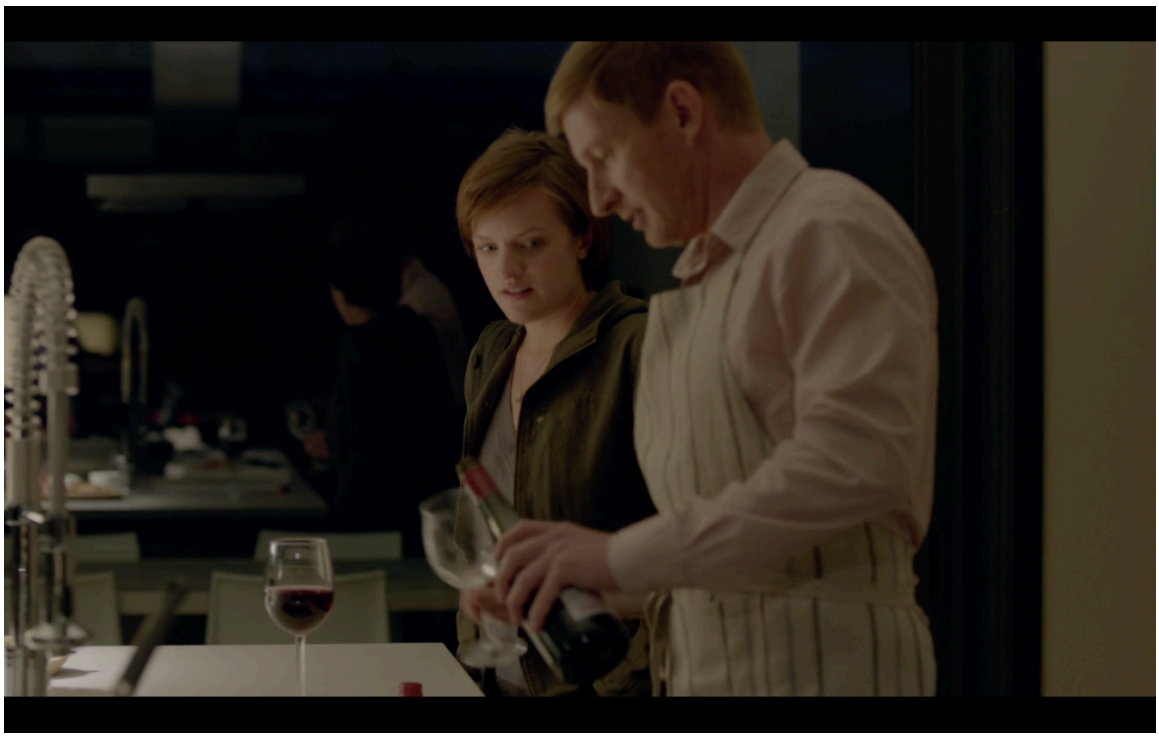

Image 15: Al pours potentially laced wine for Robin

resemblance, through his behavioral tendencies, to Alisdair. From his aggressive and violent sexual behavior to even his compulsive hair combing, Al similarly demonstrates

feelings of sexual awkwardness and a sense of inadequacy. Like Ada and Alisdair, the relationship cannot exist because of a power discrepancy and the woman's persistent unwillingness to be possessed by a man.

Campion's portrayal of Al as inherently misogynistic may first invoke a negative reaction or distaste; however, through this unsettling and subtle realism, she successfully calls attention to the inequality that permeates modern cultures and frequently goes unnoticed. In her essay, "'A Suitable Job For A Woman': Women, Work And The Television Crime Drama," film scholar Sue Turnbull notes,

> Although crime may indeed be a 'suitable job' for some women, it is clear that not all women are adequately rewarded for their efforts and there are many women who continue to be exploited in a playing field that has never really levelled out despite the interventions of feminism….in the 'real' world of crime and television, women may still come off second best… (233)

Though women in positions of power appear more frequently today in film and television, the sense of inequality silently lingers, largely unrecognized by writers and directors that deem the casting of women as feminist in itself. In *Top of the Lake*, Campion goes far beyond the centrality of a female detective in her feminism. Though to audiences, Al's tendency towards condescension through sexual and romantic advances is clear—particularly when Robin passes out and wakes up in Al's bed—Robin herself is somewhat oblivious to the implications of his behavior. However, because the viewers are more privy to this inequality, Campion directs the female gaze in a way that forces

people of all genders to sympathize and inevitably side with the numerous women characters.

Robin, like Campion's Ada and Kay, does find a balance of equal power with one male character, Johnno. Similarly to Baines, he lives a simple and solitary life in the forest. A decidedly subdued and agreeable character, Johnno requires and expects little from Robin. Their relationship is both deeply emotional and sexual, with Robin's pleasure serving as the primary goal for many of their encounters. Their first sexual encounter, which takes place in a bar bathroom, consists entirely of Robin receiving oral

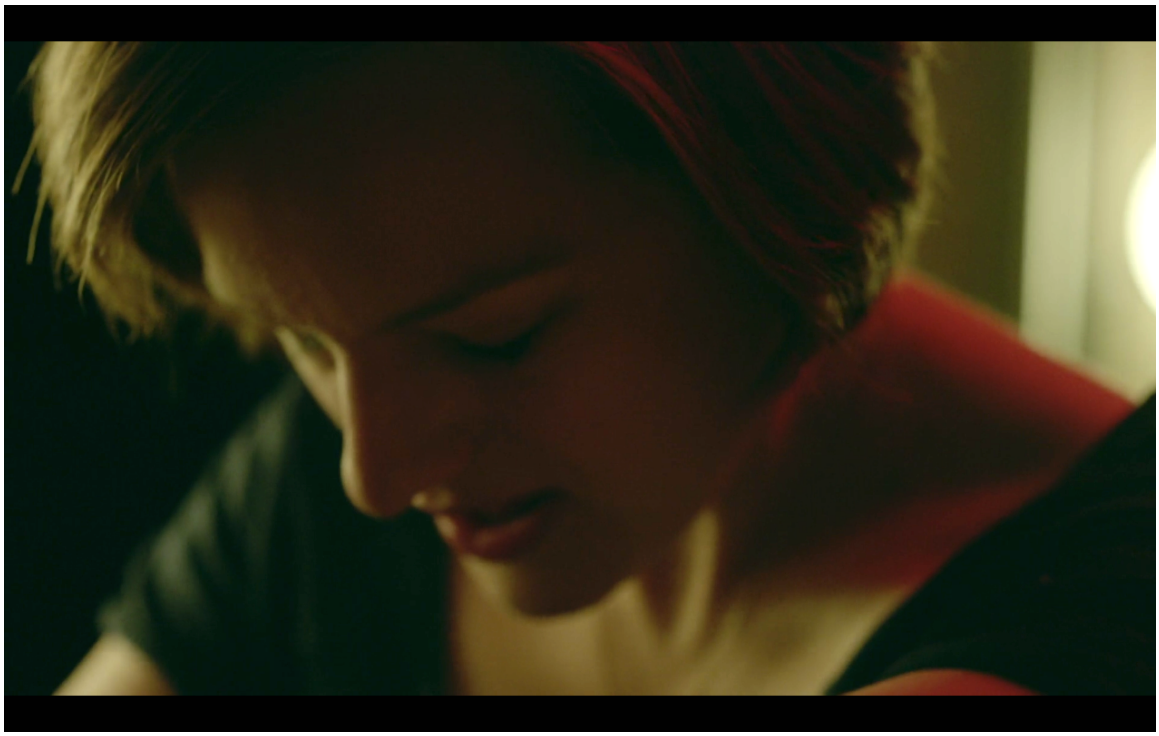

Image 16: Close-up of Robin during her first sexual encounter with Johnno

sex. The scene's cinematography, mirroring the chaotic nature of the event, is frenzied. However, there is a primary and unusual focus on Robin's face, demonstrating her pleasure. Though she did not, in this instance, initiate the sex, this cinematographic focus

emphasizes her equal sexuality, rather than her stereotypical, submissive sexual role as a woman.

Again, nature plays a notable role within this relationship; having not seen Johnno in years and still blaming him for her assault, Robin feels no attraction or warmth towards him when seeing him in a shop. However, shortly after, she visits his campsite in the woods at his request; almost immediately, she discovers a body in the lake, and they are forced to interact while waiting on police. From this point, they form a cautious friendship, which later grows into a romantic relationship. Campion here establishes a literal common ground for the pair—a place separate from their past and the conflicts that plague their individual lives. Later, after a heavily weighted and significant argument between the pair, they reconcile in the same place that their relationship began—the forest. The argument began as a result of Robin's mother forbidding the relationship, and the wooded landscape, as it does for other characters, allows them to hide their secret from those who disapprove. Serving as something of an incubator for their romantic and sexual feelings, the forest allows them to connect more deeply and unabashedly, without the fear of judgmental eyes. Whereas trees were a bad omen for *Sweetie*'s Kay, they hold almost an aphrodisiacal power for Robin. She very clearly and dominantly initiates the sex, surprising Johnno. Though their comfort is unfounded and results in their being caught, Robin and Johnno's interactions are very natural and very equal in terms of control. In the forest, the romantic aspect of sexuality is rekindled because of a mutual respect and understanding that Campion routinely uses to signify healthy sex and relationships. In this case, by positioning themselves nearer to nature, their relationship grows more and more passionate, and their capacity for vulnerability grows.

As in *The Piano*, nudity is a definite marker of this vulnerability; both Johnno and Robin are completely nude, with Johnno's exposure lasting throughout his chase of the spying men. Again, despite the vastly different scenarios between this series and the already discussed films, Johnno possesses the "to-be-looked-at-ness." What Campion does in terms of this gendered cinematography is relatively transparent in this scene; practically announcing her intentions, she ensures the focus on Johnno's body instead of Robin's. Within the scene, the characters are equal, but to audiences, the obvious,

Image 17: Johnno after being injured during the chase

dominant perspective—or gaze—is Robin's. Scholar Hilary Neroni, whose focus is largely on gender in film, also attributes Campion's formal tendencies to her feminist intentions, writing, "Form, in the Campion film, attempts to express something essential about content. Campion's main character is most often a woman driven by her passion with little or no care about how this passion might affect those around her" (Neroni 290).

Robin's adamant refusal to adhere to her mother's wishes and her additional defiance of her coworker's requests in favor of her intuitions both fit within this prescription of Campion's female leads as having "little or no care" about the repercussions of their actions.

Finally, the character of GJ cannot be overlooked, as she is among the most unusual and nontraditional of Campion's protagonists. While her "passions" are unclear, GJ's commitment to a nonconformist life is undeniable. With a decidedly androgynous persona and appearance, it is more the context of GJ's existence that leads her to be understood as a woman. Because of her role as a women's leader, she is, in some ways, more defined by others as a woman. She herself appears to think not in terms of gender but rather mental states, identifying herself a "zombie." One might assume that, as a leader of the troubled and downtrodden, GJ would possess a sense of empathy, but there is not a substantial amount of evidence that supports this. Abrasive yet enigmatic, GJ rejects the supposition that women, in general, are more nurturing and understanding. Like many of Campion's main characters, she has no regard for societal expectations or traditional gender-based standards and makes no attempt to appease those who interact with her. Particularly towards male visitors to her community, GJ puts forth no effort to be courteous, even refusing to speak with them directly, tendencies that are clearly carried over from Holly Hunter's previous character, Ada.

What GJ represents is the culmination of Campion's experimentation; when viewed chronologically, the progression of her characters and their place in society is not entirely linear, but a prominent trend is clear. Campion, beginning with *Sweetie,* demonstrates the power of women on a personal level, chronicling a family's turmoil that

results from just one woman. Experimental and unusual in its presentation, *Sweetie* has served as a starting point from which Campion has refined her artistic style and her feminist messages. From this point, she expanded the influence of the female power within her works, creating more dramatic and meaningful examples of women's

Image 18: GJ surrounded by her followers

influence. This gradual increase has led to its most recent result, the artistically polished *Top of the Lake*, in which a blatantly misogynistic society is completely overturned by three powerful women, including the truly bizarre GJ. In this series, all three of the main women, Tui, GJ, and Robin, initially appear dissimilar, but they truly share the same strong and unusual qualities with each other and their fictitious predecessors—Kay, Sweetie, Ada, and Flora. Though their lives do not bear similarities, all of these women and their stories are the plots' driving forces and also the aspects that create consistent and powerful feminist narratives.

Through the various emphases that Campion places on aspects of her works, she unfailingly creates works of genuine, cohesive art that convey her feminist beliefs. Each of the consistently present facets of Campion's films and series are intended to demonstrate something about her worldview and, as a result, clarify her status as an auteur. The three works that have been discussed represent varying and, in some ways, vastly different eras in the career of Jane Campion. However, they can easily be identified as works of auteur through the recurring themes, including nature, the female gaze, unusual female characters, and the presence of female sexuality, all of which, as has been evidenced, appear throughout her works. The female characters' strong connections to nature, though individually varying, serve to represent the powerful and unstoppable wills possessed by these women. In each work, the women have internal struggles, secrets, and desires that are represented through the natural world that surround them, and the gorgeous scenery should therefore not be taken for granted. Similarly, the male nudity and frequent objectification of even the most significant male characters should be analytically considered, as well; as a part of Campion's signature female gaze, she not only reverses the traditional standards, but also draws attention to bizarre standards to which audiences have grown accustomed. Also among these standards is the dominance, both socially and sexually, that cinematic men possess. Perhaps even more powerfully, Campion denounces these practices, showing audiences female protagonists that are far from the demure and repressed stereotype that is still idealized in modern Hollywood cinema.

Because of her extraordinarily consistent adherence to these convention-defying and incongruous habits, Campion is one of the most notable and distinctive auteurs of

modern filmmaking. Few other directors, though they may repeat formal aspects of their films, apply the auteurist methods to the themes of each film, as Campion does. Though perhaps underrated, her contributions to the film community and her prominence as a female director are occasionally recognized; from her surprise wins at film festivals and the 1994 Academy Awards, it is clear that the inherent differences within her films are noticed, even if her implications are not fully understood. In order to fully understand these implications, it is essential to regard Campion as not only an auteur, but also a feminist auteur. Particularly in her aforementioned creations, in which she serves as both writer and director, she achieves this distinction while concurrently making enjoyable and acclaimed works. These simultaneous achievements are truly testaments to her filmmaking prowess as a feminist auteur, especially considering that they still have the abilities to shock and inspire meaningful thought, even, in the case of *Sweetie*, twenty-seven years after their releases.